



## A Quick Look

# Washington State Department of Ecology

*Our mission: The mission of the Department of Ecology is to protect, preserve and enhance Washington's environment and promote the wise management of our air, land, and water for the benefit of current and future generations.*

## Working with you for a better Washington

The quality of the environment affects everyone. Clean air, water and soil are essential for good health and quality of life. They're also important to many sectors of the business community, including tourism and agriculture. The Department of Ecology works in partnership with the public to preserve and manage resources that are important to our future, and to prevent and clean up pollution so we can lead healthy lives.

Much of Washington's pollution comes from the combined effects of many small sources. Our population of more than 6 million people burns wood stoves, grows lawns and gardens, drives cars, creates and expands industries, constructs buildings, and generates garbage, sewage and other waste.

All of these activities have potential to produce pollution. We also use large amounts of water for drinking, bathing, laundry, irrigation, washing cars, and industrial purposes. Together, the effects of living and working can add up to big environmental problems. That's why it's important for all of us to avoid creating waste and pollution.

While enforcement actions sometimes are necessary when environmental laws are broken, we prefer to work with businesses and citizens in a cooperative manner to protect and clean up the environment – which is why we have adopted the slogan "Working with you for a better Washington."

Whether you want to support the environment at home or at work, the Department of Ecology can provide a great deal of useful information and education. We invite you to call us if you have questions, suggestions for serving you better, or ideas about improving the environment in your community. We are here to listen and work with you to keep Washington a great place to live and work.

## History

In 1970, the state legislature declared that residents have a right to a healthful, pleasant environment and assurance of proper development and use of the state's natural resources. Several small agencies that provided environmental protection at the time were combined and renamed the Department of Ecology. Today, Ecology provides services through our headquarters in Lacey and through four regional offices and three field offices that are located in communities around the state.

Since the 1970s, air quality in Washington cities has improved, toxic chemicals released by industry have dropped significantly, and we attained one of the highest waste-recycling rates in the country. Water quality also has improved notably in some areas, but is still threatened in others. While we are proud of our successes, we recognize there are more improvements to be made, and we must be vigilant about maintaining the ground we've gained.

## We are

Scientists, engineers, educators, managers, and support staff. We carry out nearly 150 state and federal environmental laws covering:

- Air quality
- Water quality
- Hazardous and nuclear wastes
- Water allocation
- Shoreline and wetlands protection
- Prevention, response and cleanup for oil and hazardous-material spills
- Commercial underground storage tanks
- Litter control
- State and federal environmental grants
- Land-use management and siting of major projects
- Watershed-based planning

## What we do

### Monitor, regulate and educate

We sample the quality of Washington's air and water, glean information on the overall health of the state's environment. We also write and enforce permits that limit the flow of pollutants into the air and water, as well as permits for handling and storing hazardous wastes. In some parts of the state, the Department of Ecology is the primary environmental regulator; in others, we support local-government efforts.

Have you seen the Dump No Waste stencils near storm drains? That started at Ecology. We also provide useful information to residents about recycling, producing less garbage, reducing emissions from cars and wood stoves, and protecting water and wetlands. In schools, the department supports teachers with hands-on curriculums. Ecology experts also help businesses and local governments comply with environmental regulations cost-effectively.

### Inform, train and assist

- 800-RECYCLE hotline.
- *TREE Program* – consulting with businesses on reducing their hazardous wastes.
- *Regulatory/permit assistance centers at headquarters and regional offices* – coordinating environmental permits for businesses and governments.
- *Washington Conservation Corps and Ecology Youth Corps.*
- *Accredited laboratory* (co-managed with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency).
- *Prevention and cleanup strategies for spills in Puget Sound, the Columbia River and along the Washington coast.*
- *Vehicle-emission inspection* programs.

## Highlights of 2004 accomplishments

- Retrofitted 20 percent of Washington's school buses to reduce pollution in their exhaust.
- Finished pumping high-level liquid waste from Hanford's single-shell tanks.
- Completed 327 toxic cleanups.
- Won passage of a new law to prevent stormwater pollution.
- Won a national award for our school anti-idling effort, which is now being replicated by other states.
- Reduced hazardous wastes generated by 25 million pounds.
- Adopted power-plant CO<sub>2</sub> rules to combat global warming.

- Strengthened financial requirements for hazardous-waste facilities.
- Responded to 1,337 meth labs and more than 2,600 oil/hazardous-materials spills.
- Won agreement from the cruise industry to limit their wastewater discharges in Washington's waters.

## Current & future challenges

- Combat global warming.
- Reduce toxic and diesel emissions.
- Finish the action plan on limiting exposure to toxic flame retardants.
- Sign mercury-waste agreements with hospitals and auto recyclers.
- Clean up arsenic contamination at schools and playgrounds.
- Resolve off-site waste issues at Hanford.
- Maintain progress on constructing the Waste Treatment Facility at Hanford.
- Adopt stream-flow regulations in more than a dozen watersheds.
- Increase water storage in Washington to stabilize supplies for people, farms and fish.
- Halt pollution that's robbing Hood Canal of dissolved oxygen.
- Improve spill-response procedures, technology and citizen involvement.
- Update the state's spill-contingency regulation.

## Want to know more?

- **General Information:** 360-407-6000 in Lacey
- **Regional Offices:**
  - Spokane*, 509-329-3400
  - Yakima*, 509-575-2490
  - Lacey*, 360-407-6300
  - Bellevue*, 425-649-7000
- **Field Offices:**
  - Vancouver*, 360-690-7171
  - Bellingham*, 360-738-6250
  - Richland* (Nuclear Waste Program only), 509-372-7950
- **Ecology's World Wide Web site:** [www.ecy.wa.gov](http://www.ecy.wa.gov)

*If you require this publication in an alternate format, please contact us in Lacey at 360-407-7006 or (TTY) at 711 or 800-833-6388.*

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